



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
HARRISBURG

THE GOVERNOR

May 2, 2006

The Honorable Dorcas R. Hardy
Chairman
White House Conference on Aging
4350 East West Highway
3rd Floor
Bethesda, MD 20814

Dear Chairman Hardy:

I am writing in response to your letter dated March 15, 2006 asking for my comments on the preliminary report of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA). First, I wish to thank you and your staff for their hard work and dedication in making the 2005 WHCoA such a success. You and your staff have admirably served our nation's older adults. While I believe that all 73 resolutions are important to our nation's older adults, the conference dealt with several specific issues that are most critical to the needs of Pennsylvania.

One of my most pressing concerns is securing the support of the WHCoA to advocate for the re-authorization of the Older Americans Act. Reauthorizing the Older Americans Act will positively impact Pennsylvanians by ensuring the continuity of existing programs and services that help older adults age in their most preferred setting, their own home and community. As evidence of this resolution receiving the most votes, the reauthorizing the Older Americans Act is a vital resource in our state's ability to provide aging services.

I also urge the conference to send a strong message, in the final report to Congress, highlighting the need for the federal government to support transportation services for older adults. As we know, the ability for an older adult to drive diminishes with age and thus the opportunity for independence becomes more challenging. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has recognized transportation as one of its priorities for the 2004-2008 State Plan on Aging. Specifically, Pennsylvania objectives are to enhance responsive community based transportation systems that meet the mobility needs of older Pennsylvanians and to assist older drivers, their families and caregivers to make informed choices about mobility options. During our travels across the state, we have found that older adults in rural and urban areas each encounter different transportation problems, which require different responses and approaches. I

request that the final report include the innovative approaches to transportation that were discussed in the WHCoA implementation sessions.

Another priority for Pennsylvania is meeting the long-term care needs and preferences of older adults by supporting home and community-based care. Our objectives in this area are to:

1. Effectively respond to consumer preferences by increasing the availability of home and community-based services options.
2. Expand the numbers of consumers in our PDA Waiver, which service people in their homes.
3. Enable more older adults to transition from nursing home beds to home and community-based services.

Having Medicaid continue to provide coverage of home and community based services is crucial to reaching our goal. And one integral part of home and community based care is housing within Pennsylvania's communities.

Since 2001 Federal funding for the combined HUD Section 202 and 811 Programs has decreased by 14% or \$83.6 million. All indicators are that this funding is anticipated to continue to decrease. Between the Census Years 2000 to 2010 the U.S. population age 65 and older will increase by 14%. By 2010 there will be 40 million persons over 65. This coupled with the issue of fixed incomes for older Americans will continue to promote the need for low-income subsidized housing for older Americans over the next decade. Secondary to this, the federal program requirements that must be met for the award of HUD funding continue to increase. Reduced funding with increased need means that developers must meet stiffer standards to achieve approval. Meeting these requirements in low-income neighborhoods has become a dilemma.

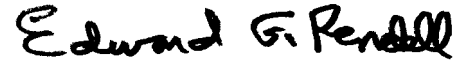
Most states in conjunction with CMS have clearly stated their desire to reduce the numbers of institutionalized elders through the development of community-based programs. Unfortunately there is no clear plan that articulates an approach to meeting the housing needs of these elders. From a community perspective the housing stock in inner cities is steadily aging. City and state sponsored funding for low and very low-income affordable housing is also decreasing or nonexistent. As a result many elders cling to home ownership in order to stretch retirement income to meet the daily costs of living though they lack the physical ability to maintain their home. If the stated requirement is to age in place it is time to find alternatives for affordable housing for older Americans.

Please find the enclosed Pennsylvania 2004 – 2008 State Plan on Aging which the Department of Aging invested a significant amount of time and energy. This plan includes input from citizens as well as stakeholders in the aging network. I believe it will augment my comments and provide additional insight on

Pennsylvania's efforts to improve services to older adults and establish our vision for long-term enhancements to the service network.

I look forward to working with the conference, the federal government, and Congress to ensure we fully realize the vision embodied in the final report to Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward G. Rendell". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Edward G. Rendell
Governor